Republicans Say Row Prolongs Viet War

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House Republican leaders said yesterday the Democratic dispute over Vietnam "is prolonging the war." They called on President Johnson to disavow dissenters in his Party to end confusion.

Eight Republicans led by House GOP leader Gerald R. Ford (Mich.) called a news conference to read a statement drafted by the House Republicans Policy Committee. It began:

"The deep division within the Democratic Party over American policy in Vietnam is prolonging the war, undermining the morale of our fighting men and encouraging the Communist aggressor." It went on to blame doubting or dissenting Democrats with confusing people at home and abroad and causing the administration to "dodge and shift" in its policy statements.

The Republicans called on the President to "take command of his Party." Until the Administration and majority party speaks with a clear single voice, they said, "the divisive debate will continue, the confusion will grow, and a peaceful solution will elude us."

Republicans had been relatively quiet about Vietnam, content to sit back and watch Democrats fight among themselves. Their statement yesterday, coming on the heels of the long Senate debate on a larger military debate for Vietnam, apparently was intended to remind anyone was wasn't listening that the Democrats are divided on the issue.

Ford has said and repeated yesterday that Republicans should not try to make a political issue of Vietnam.

He noted that Republicans in both houses have been unanimous in support of the extra funds.

"The American people may make it an issue," said Ford. "If it becomes a political issue it will be because of the deep division in the Democratic Party. I think this is what will disturb the people."

Rep. John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.), chairman of the policy committee which drafted the statement, twice said: "We don't intend to tell Mr. Johnson how to run his war." Questioned about this, Rhodes said he had not intended to coin a phrase "Johnson's war," but meant that as Commander in Chief the President is in charge.